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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHWARTZ MEETS WITH
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERALS HOLMES AND STARR IN NEW YORK

1. (SBU) Summary: Eric Schwartz, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) visited New York on July 13 for meetings with the United Nations and USUN/New York. In talks with the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, Schwartz reviewed the current situation in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. On the topic of Pakistan, Schwartz pushed Holmes on the appointment of a senior humanitarian coordinator to improve the response to the needs of displaced and other conflict-affected populations. Holmes also briefed Schwartz on the status of the UN's efforts on humanitarian reform. Schwartz met the newly-appointed UN Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, Greg Starr, and stressed the importance of robust UN security measures to allow humanitarian operations to function in hostile environments. End summary.

2. (SBU) Holmes began the discussion by noting that the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has become reasonably well-established as a major player in the field of humanitarian assistance. He noted that many UN agencies and NGOs were reluctant to support OCHA's mandate to coordinate humanitarian assistance initially, but over the past ten years there has been a significant change. Now most humanitarian agencies value OCHA's role and look to OCHA for leadership when a humanitarian crisis emerges.

3. (SBU) Holmes brief Schwartz on the status of the UN's humanitarian reform initiative. Heremarked that the cluster approach is beginning to yield results and making a difference thought it remains a work in progress. The cluster system is now generally in place, but lead agencies must devote sufficient resources and attention to make it work properly. Holmes stated that progress has been made in strengthening the role of the UN's humanitarian coordinators (HC) system. The UN has developed and implemented improved training for HCs and developed a stronger pool of candidates that includes individuals with greater humanitarian experience, including from humanitarian agencies outside of the UN system. Holmes remarked improving partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a priority for OCHA. Schwartz replied that PRM will also prioritize engagement with NGOs and civil society when implementing its mandated activities. Finally, Holmes discussed humanitarian financing and emphasized the importance of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and other pooled funds as important tools for allowing a more rapid and predictable response to humanitarian emergencies. Holmes hoped that the Obama administration could provide more generous support to the CERF. Schwartz replied that requests for additional funding of the CERF would be reviewed, but that the accountability of pooled funds remains an issue.

14. (SBU) On Pakistan, Holmes explained that the initial humanitarian response had been good, especially in camps set up for internally-displaced persons (IDPs). However, he noted the significant burden placed by IDPs on host communities and remarked that additional efforts must be made to address the urgent needs of communities hosting IDPs. Holmes noted that significant numbers of IDPs had returned to Buner due to improved security and only modest damage to infrastructure. He expressed uncertainty if returns would take place on a large scale in SWAT due to greater damage to infrastructure caused by fighting as well as greater levels of insecurity. Holmes said that a turning point has been reached in Pakistan in terms of the humanitarian situation. If the return of IDPs continues at a brisk pace, humanitarian needs will diminish. However, if returns become stalled, the situation could become worse.

15. (SBU) Schwartz raised the issue of a senior humanitarian coordinator for Pakistan. Holmes responded that this matter was under review at the UN, but that he was not convinced that a senior coordinator is needed on the humanitarian side. He expressed the opinion that such an appointment might cause more harm than good. Holmes told Schwartz that he did not see the utility of the appointment of a senior humanitarian coordinator beyond enhanced fund-raising. He thought that a senior coordinator for the whole UN system might make more sense, but that this type of appointment would be strongly opposed by the government of Pakistan. Schwartz pushed back, stating that if handled correctly, the appointment of a senior humanitarian coordinator could send an important

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political signal that would energize the participation of other donors and move the process of strengthening humanitarian assistance forward.

16. (SBU) Schwartz raised the topic of Sri Lanka and the UN's efforts to address the humanitarian situation in the North. Holmes described the situation as extremely frustrating with over 280,000 IDPs kept in internment camps by the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). He stated that the GoSL has promised to move forward on the registration of IDPs, family reunification and freedom of movement for IDPs, but has actually delivered very little. Holmes viewed the situation as an opportunity for the GoSL to prove its critics wrong on the treatment of the Tamil population, but fears that this may be an opportunity lost by the GoSL. He felt that donors had very little leverage in pressuring the GoSL to improve its treatment of the IDPs. Those countries with leverage such as China and India are unlikely to wield it. Holmes stated that the UN and others should keep continual pressure on the GoSL through high-level visits to the country.

17. (SBU) Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, Greg Starr, told Schwartz that the UN flag offered some measure of protection to UN humanitarian workers operating in hostile environments ten years ago. He remarked that the UN has become more of a target over the past decade with groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban actively seeking to disrupt humanitarian operations as they are seen as part of a broader western agenda. Starr noted that upon recently taking up his new duties as USG for Safety and Security, the Secretary-General told him that he must find a way for the UN to operate in tough environments and not pack up and leave immediately due to security concerns. Starr reviewed a number of challenges to providing security for UN humanitarian operations including a dispersal of authority and financing for security among a number of UN agencies as well as a modest budget and shortages of key positions, particularly in intelligence. He conceded that the UN must be willing to spend more money on security if it is serious about operating in places such as Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan. Schwartz noted there can be a tension between the imperative of life-sustaining support in hostile environments and imperative of ensuring

that that humanitarian workers are not subject to harm. He stressed, however, that humanitarians must often operate in dangerous environments, and underscored the importance of making adequate resources for security so that they can function effectively.

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